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SOLDIER and SERVANT SERIES

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
THOMAS CHURCH BROWNELL
THIRD BISHOP OF CONNECTICUT

INTRODUCTION
BY
THE REV. WILLIAM A. BEARDSLEY, D.D.

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THOMAS CHURCH BROWNELL,

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in Connecticut, by the Rev. E. Edwards Beardsley, D. D.

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INTRODUCTION

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In the Archives of the Diocese of Connecticut there is a brief manuscript of more than passing interest to the Church people of Connecticut. It is the autobiography of Thomas Church Brownell, the third Bishop of the Diocese of Connecticut, autographic even as it is autobiographic. It was written at the request of his successor, Bishop John Williams, and bears the date, "Hartford, May 22d, 1858."

It is all the more interesting, because at that time the shadows were beginning to fall, and the infirmities of age were coming on apace, and one can almost sense the effort which it cost him to set down these facts of his life, an effort undertaken, perhaps, then laid aside, to be resumed later, until finally the note of success is sounded in the opening words, "In fulfillment of my promise." We may be grateful to Bishop Williams who made the request, and abundantly grateful to Bishop Brownell for granting it.

For almost always in the story of a man's life it is the earlier years which are more or less legendary and obscure, and so to have the authentic record of those years is a great asset in the understanding of whatever success he may attain. One who reads the Bishop's Autobiography, so perfectly simple and straightforward, will have no difficulty in seeing behind the words the forces which made him what he became.

The Autobiography comes down only to his consecration on October 27th, 1819. On this note, which breathes the gentle humility of the man, he ends, "With what degree of faithfulness, and with what success, I have fulfilled the duties of the sacred office, it becomes not me to speak."

That year 1819 was an eventful one in the history of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Those who are familiar with the religious history of Connecticut know the autocratic power of the Congregational Standing Order. It held the offices, it made the laws. The Episcopal Church could groan, but that brought small relief. The votes were on the other side.

But in 1817 there appeared signs of easement. A political change was coming. Oliver Wolcott was elected Governor, Jonathan Ingersoll Lieutenant Governor. Ingersoll was a member of the Episcopal Church. Light was dawning. In the General Assembly there were able men who belonged to the Episcopal Church. In 1818 the Constitution was adopted which gave to all equal civil and religious rights. The State church was a thing of the past.

This, then, was the situation when Bishop Brownell took up the duties of his office. It was a wonderful opportunity for the right man, and the right man had arrived. He was not entering into a barren field, indeed, Bishop White, who preached the consecration sermon says, "It will not escape the recollection of the reverend Brother elected to this charge, that he will be labouring in a field already prepared for cultivation," but the conditions of work in that field were now freer, and the laborer might reasonably hope for a freer response.

Bishop Brownell had no background of Episcopal training, for he was not brought up in the Episcopal Church. But somehow the absence of that seemed to make no difference. There is no instance in the history of our American Church where promotion was so rapid and so secure. Here is the sequence of the steps taken: baptized September 5th, 1813; confirmed within a week; ordained Deacon April 11th, 1816; advanced to the Priesthood August 4th, 1816; consecrated Bishop October 27th, 1819. That would not have happened to any mediocre man.

Bishop Brownell was a teacher. He had lived and worked in the academic atmosphere of Union College, and he never lost his love for the teaching profession. From Union he went to be Assistant Minister in Trinity Church, New York City, and here, he supposed, he was anchored for life, but it proved to be merely a port of call, for within the year came the summons to be the Bishop of Connecticut.

Some time had intervened since the death of Bishop Jarvis, due in part to the difficulty of finding the right man, and due in part to the financial obligation involved. The fund for the support of the Bishop was quite inadequate, and not unnaturally that caused some delay in appointing a successor to Bishop Jarvis. But Bishop Brownell lightly brushed that difficulty aside. "With respect to pecuniary support, I do not feel any great solicitude," is the way he met the matter in his letter of acceptance. He felt that if the diocese would look out for his family he could look out for himself by "the performance of such parish or missionary services as may not be incompatible with my duties to the diocese at large." All the time we are seeing the calibre of the man.

When he came to Connecticut to be its Bishop he took up his residence in Hartford, just why is not known, his predecessor had lived in

New Haven. He had no sooner settled in Hartford than he experienced a momentary thrill. Remember, he was at heart a teacher. Theological education was much in his mind. He keenly felt the importance of it, felt the need of an institution which should furnish that education.

In 1817 the General Convention acted, and the General Theological Seminary was established in New York. For some reason it did not thrive there, and in 1820 it was removed to New Haven. This was the momentary thrill referred to. He immediately gave up his connection with Christ Church, Hartford, and moved to New Haven that he might be near the Seminary "during its infant state." But the infant, in less than two years, fled back to New York, lured thither by a generous legacy, and Bishop Brownell was left to nurse his disappointment, as best he could.

That he was disappointed, bitterly disappointed, is clear from this passage from his convention address in 1822: "It is well known to you," he says, "that at the late special General Convention referred to, the Theological Seminary of our Church was transferred from this diocese to that of New York. This measure was adopted that the Institution might avail itself of a munificent bequest of the late Jacob Sherred, for the advancement of theological education; and it was acquiesced in by the delegation from this diocese, from considerations affecting the peace and unity of the Church. I have often expressed my sentiments concerning the importance of a general theological seminary. I trust its present location will have a tendency to harmonize all discordant opinions on this subject, and that as it is an object of paramount importance to the Church, so it will now receive its liberal and united patronage."

But the Bishop was not to be denied his institution of learning. This time it was a college. For years the Churchmen of Connecticut had tried to get a charter for a college, but without success. Finally, in 1823 a charter was granted, and Washington College was established, its home Hartford. That was not really intended to be the permanent name, but some name had to be inserted in the charter, and that was the name. Later, in 1845, it became Trinity College.

The college opened in 1824, and Bishop Brownell became its first President, continuing in that office until 1831, when, because of the cares and burdens of the Episcopate, he felt the necessity of relinquishing it. There was enough work in either office to command the entire time and energy of one man. Bishop Brownell's connection with the college forms a bright chapter in the history of the Church and of education in Connecticut.

The Bishop was not only interested in the great subject of education, theological education especially, but he was interested in the great subject of Missions. It fell to his lot to preach the sermon at the open-

ing of the General Convention of 1829. His text was, "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing," and his subject was "Christian Zeal." It was a strong missionary sermon. With its vigorous words ringing in their ears, what more natural than that the directors of the Missionary Society, wishing to send someone on a journey to the southwest "to spy out the land," should send him? He went, left a manuscript record of his journey which greatly increased the Church's knowledge of a vast field which, as yet, had barely been touched. He was the pioneer prospector.

Bishop Brownell's life was a long one, as was his Episcopate. When Bishop Philander Chase died in 1852, Bishop Brownell succeeded him as Presiding Bishop. He died January 13th, 1865.

With what better words can this introduction come to an end than with these words of his assistant and successor, "Our late Bishop was a godly man. His religion was not a religion that spent itself in words. Its stream was too deep and too full to flow otherwise than silently. But it spoke with that strongest logic and most persuasive rhetoric, the logic and the rhetoric of a consistent, even, well balanced Christian life."

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THOMAS CHURCH BROWNELL THE BISHOP ELECT

HARTFORD, May 22d, 1858.

RIGHT REV. AND DEAR BROTHER: In fulfillment of my promise, I now give you a sketch of the principal events of my life, previous to my consecration to the Episcopate.

I was born at Westport, in the State of Massachusetts, on the 19th day of October, in the year 1779. I am the oldest son of the late Sylvester and Mercy Brownell, and the first born of their eleven children — five sons and six daughters.

My father was the fourth in descent from George Brownell, who with a cousin by the name of Graves, purchased from the Narranganset Indians a tract of land lying on the seacoast, extending westward from the Acoaxset River, to the border of the Rhode Island Colony. The farm on which my father resided has continued in possession of the family from the time of its original purchase, to within the last thirty years, when he removed from that place to a farm which he owned in the town of Little Compton, Rhode Island. He died at the latter place, about eighteen years ago, in the eighty-second year of his age. My mother had died about three years earlier, at the same advanced period of life.

Of the lineage of my mother, Baylies in his "Memoirs of the Plymouth Colony" (vol. ii. p. 140), has the following note: —

"Thomas Church, the eldest son of the Warrior (Col. Benjamin Church) left children; one of whom was the late Hon. Thomas Church, one of the assistants of the Government of Rhode Island, and colonel of one of the Rhode Island regiments at the commencement of the Revolutionary War. He was born at Little Compton. In the latter years of his life, he removed to Dighton, in Massachusetts, of which town he was a representative in the General Court. He died there. One of his daughters married the Hon. Sylvester Brownell of Westport, Massachusetts, and is the mother of the Right Rev. Thomas Church Brownell, Bishop of Connecticut."

In my early life, I received, as a farmer's son, a common country school education. At the age of fifteen, when no schoolmaster could be obtained for the district, I consented to act as schoolmaster myself, for several months, and succeeded in securing the respect of my former schoolmates.

About three years after this, with the approbation of my parents, I spent a few months with our clergyman, the Rev. Dr. Shepard, in the study of English grammar, and the rudiments of the Latin language. In pursuance of his advice, and with the approval of my parents, I resolved on obtaining a collegiate education; and became a student of "Bristol Academy," at Taunton, under the Rev. Dr. Daggett, as Principal.

In September, of the next year, 1800, I entered as a member of the Freshman class in the College at Providence, then under the presidency of the Rev. Dr. Maxcy.

In the summer of 1802, at the close of my Sophomore year, the Doctor was appointed to the presidency of Union College, Schenectady; and having formed a strong attachment to him, I accompanied him and his family to their new residence, and became a member of the Junior class in Union College. At the end of two years I was graduated there, at the head of my class, with the "Valedictory."

It had been, for some time, my intention to devote myself to the study of theology, at the conclusion of my collegiate course; and it was the earnest wish of my parents that I should do so. I had, however, begun to find difficulties in the Calvinistic system of theology, in which I had been reared; but resolved to make myself better acquainted with it, before coming to a decision. The Rev. Dr. Nott was then a distinguished clergyman of the Presbyterian Church, at Albany, and kindly consented to take me under his tuition. He had the faculty of presenting these doctrines under a somewhat mitigated form; but advised me to study well the early history of the Church; and for this purpose he put into my hands the "Ecclesiastical History" of Mosheim. After reading a portion of this work, I enquired of my instructor whether there was any more minute history of the *early organization of the Christian Church*; and he referred me to Echard's "History of the first four Centuries," which he had in his library. I read these volumes with deep interest. At the conclusion, I remarked to my instructor that, if the author was correct, the first organization of the Christian Church must have been more like that of the Episcopal Communion, than either the Presbyterian or Congregational denominations. He appeared to admit this fact, but seemed to regard it as a matter of little importance. It was, however, not so with me; and wishing to read further on the subject,

I enquired what work he could recommend? He jocularly replied, "Go to Dr. Beasley; he can tell you." I took the advice in earnest; and introducing myself to the Rev. Doctor, enquired if he could recommend to me any approved work on the first organization of the Christian Church? He went to his library, and bringing out the work of Archbishop Potter on that subject, kindly offered me the loan of it. The perusal of this work was like the opening of a new world to me. I read the whole with deep attention. It unfolded to me a new aspect of Christianity. The survey afforded to me unspeakable relief; but it was necessarily attended with many regrets. I had no near relation, and no intimate friend, belonging to the Episcopal Church; and I seemed to be left alone in the world, in regard to my religious sympathies.

It was now autumn; and I determined to return to my home, for the winter, and to take time for a decision in regard to my future course.

About this time, Dr. Maxcy, the President of Union College, had been called to the Presidency of the University of Columbia, South Carolina, and the Rev. Dr. Nott was elected to fill his place. Soon after he had accepted, and entered on his new duties, I was appointed tutor in the Latin and Greek languages, in the institution. After due reflection, I decided to accept the station, and entered on the discharge of its duties on the 5th of April, 1805.

To sustain myself reputably, in my new position, I was now obliged to devote all my leisure hours to the study of the ancient classics.

At the Commencement of 1807, I was elected Professor of "Belles Lettres and Moral Philosophy." A new department of learning was now opened to me, which necessarily occupied the greater portion of my thoughts and of my studies.

Two years later, I was again requested to change my professorship, and course of study. The sciences of Chemistry and Mineralogy were then in their infancy in this country. But Professor Silliman, of Yale College, had now returned from Europe, with an imposing chemical apparatus. A fine cabinet of minerals had been procured for that institution from Colonel Gibbs; and these acquisitions had given to Yale College an imposing position, which could not fail to stimulate the exertions of kindred institutions. Accordingly, a department of Chemistry and Mineralogy was established in Union College, at the Commencement, in 1809, and I was appointed the first Professor; with leave to spend a year in Europe, in the examination of kindred institutions.

In the autumn, I sailed for England; having been appointed, by President Madison, as "Bearer of Despatches" to Mr. Pinckney, the American Minister in London, and to General Lyman, the United States Consul General. It was during the famous Embargo; and the only

conveyance to be obtained was by the *British Packet* from New York to Falmouth. It was also during the famous "restrictive system" of Bonaparte, and there was allowed no communication between England and the Continent of Europe.

My travels and researches were, therefore, necessarily confined to Great Britain and Ireland. I had taken letters of introduction to Sir Humphrey Davy, Dr. Singer, Dr. Babington, Dr. Marcet, William Allen, and other distinguished scientific gentlemen in London, and found a free access to their cabinets, laboratories, and lectures. My winter was thus spent very industriously in London.

In the spring, I had resolved on a tour through the interior of England, Scotland, and Ireland; and a well-educated young gentleman of New York, who had been my fellow-passenger on ship-board, and fellow-boarder in London, volunteered to accompany me. Our object was not so much to see the large towns, as to examine the agricultural, manufacturing, and mining operations of the country; and to effect this end we resolved to travel on foot. Though such a mode of traveling, by gentlemen in our situation, was then a novelty, we found no reason to regret our decision. On one occasion, indeed, in an obscure part of Scotland, and when separated from our credentials, we were arrested for a robbery and murder which had been committed in the vicinity; yet we found but little difficulty in making our real character understood, and were speedily released.

We spent a considerable time in exploring the caverns and mines of Derbyshire; and in visiting the manufactories of Worcester, Manchester, and Birmingham; and in admiring the lake and mountain scenery of Cumberland and Westmoreland. We passed through the southern part of Scotland to Port Patrick; and from thence crossed over to Donaghadee, in Ireland. After visiting Lough Neagh, and the Giant's Causeway, we returned by the eastern coast of Ireland to Belfast, and thence by packet, again to Port Patrick, in Scotland. From the latter place we pursued our way along the western coast to the city of Glasgow. In this latter place we spent two or three weeks, during which time I had free access to the laboratories of Dr. Ure and Dr. Cleghorn. From Glasgow we proceeded to the city of Edinburgh. Here we spent a few weeks in examining the most interesting objects of the city and its environs. I found every facility in visiting the laboratories, and attending the lectures of the distinguished chemists and mineralogists, who have added so much to the fame of the ancient capital of the kingdom.

Our peregrinations on foot terminated in this city. It had come to be time for our return to America. We took the mail stage for Liverpool; from whence we embarked in a merchant ship for New York. After a

pleasant passage to that city, I reached my home at Union College, just in time to commence my course of chemical instruction at the opening of the Fall term.

I had brought with me a considerable cabinet of minerals, and sufficient chemical apparatus to enable me to illustrate the principles of chemical science to advantage. Thus had passed one of the most busy and eventful years of my life; and I now entered on my course of instruction with zeal and industry.

The year after my return from Europe, on the 6th of August, 1811, I was married to Charlotte Dickinson, of the city of Lansingburgh, N. Y. She was the daughter of Tertullus Dickinson, once a partner in mercantile business with Col. Beverly Robinson, of New York, and her mother was a daughter of Dr. Huggefurd, an eminent physician of the same city.

My wife, and nearly all her connections, were of the Episcopal Church; and we were married by the Rev. Dr. Butler, Rector of St. Paul's Church, Troy. I was thus, for the first time, brought into intimate relations with Episcopalians.

Previous to this, I had become convinced of the historical and Scriptural grounds of Episcopacy, yet I had not felt the necessity of changing my church relations. But I was now led to give a more particular examination to this subject. At the ensuing Easter, I took a pew in St. George's Church, Schenectady, under the Rectorship of the Rev. Dr. Stebbins. On the 5th of September, 1813, I was baptized in that church by the Rector. Shortly afterwards I was confirmed by the Bishop, and was admitted to the Holy Communion of the Church.

It will seem strange that I had not received Christian Baptism at an earlier period. The fact of the delay is to be accounted for, though not justified, by the state of society in which I was reared.

The community in which my early years were passed, were either Quakers, or Calvinistic Congregationalists. My parents attended public worship with the latter denomination; and though they had a distance of five miles to travel, and over bad roads, they were very punctual in their attendance, and were careful to provide a conveyance for a good portion of their family. Though always exemplary in their moral character, they were not technically "members of the Church." But when they came to be about forty years old, an extensive "revival" prevailed in their vicinity; they became subjects of it, and were then baptized, with all their younger children. I was at that time some thirty miles from home, at Bristol Academy, and on the point of entering college. I may add, too, that it was then considered almost an unheard of thing that a person twenty years of age should receive baptism, unless he was the subject of some prevailing *revival*, and had, as it was termed, "experi-

enced a change of heart"; a change which was supposed to be sudden, if not instantaneous, and wrought by the irresistible operation of the Holy Ghost.

Soon after my baptism, confirmation, and admission to the Holy Communion of the Church, I began to devote my leisure hours to the study of theology, as it is taught in the standard Church works — not, however, with a view to the relinquishment of my college avocations, but in the hope that I might add to my usefulness by receiving Holy Orders, and affording a Sunday supply to some vacant parishes in my vicinity.

On the eleventh of April, 1816, I was admitted to the Holy Order of Deacons, in Trinity Church, New York, by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Hobart; and soon afterwards, in the same place, I was admitted by him to the Holy Order of the Priesthood.

During the ensuing summer and autumn, I officiated every Sunday in vacant parishes within twenty miles of Schenectady. In the early part of the following spring, I was attacked with a severe disease, which settled on my lungs, and disqualified me for labor through the ensuing summer. In the autumn, my physician advised me to spend the coming winter in a milder climate, and I determined on a journey through the Southern States. Accordingly, I proceeded, by easy stages, as far south as Georgia; spending a few days in each principal city by the way, and devoting four or five weeks each to Charleston and Savannah. My health was, all the time, steadily improving, and I found myself able to preach at least a portion of nearly every Sunday.

Returning to New York in the spring, with recovered health, I spent a Sunday there, and preached in Trinity and St. Paul's Churches. There was then a vacancy in the ministry of Trinity parish, occasioned by the recent defection of the Rev. Dr. How. Shortly after returning to my home in Schenectady, I received an invitation to fill that vacancy. The overture was altogether unexpected. But as I received private letters from the Bishop, who was Rector of the parish, and also from his two assistants, assuring me that my acceptance would be agreeable to them personally, I decided on a change of occupation, after the ensuing College Commencement, if my health should then appear to be sufficiently re-established.

Accordingly, in the ensuing month of August, I entered on the duties of Assistant Minister of Trinity Church, New York, and removed my family to that city in the following October.

My residence in the city of New York was of brief duration, but was, in all respects, agreeable. I was received with great cordiality by the Bishop, and by my brethren of the clergy, and with all kindness by the

people among whom I was called to minister. I supposed I had then entered upon the labors of my entire subsequent life.

But, in the following June, I was waited on by a delegation from Connecticut, informing me of my election to the Episcopal charge of that Diocese. Such an event was altogether unexpected by me. I had received no previous intimation of it; and having entered the sacred ministry so late in life, there would have been but little probability that I should ever be called to one of its highest stations. But though such an office was not to be sought, nor expected, it was not to be hastily declined.

After seeking the Divine direction, after consultation with my Bishop and other friends, and under assurances of the unanimity of my election, I decided on accepting the solemn responsibilities of the office to which I was called.

I was accordingly consecrated to the Episcopal office, in Trinity Church, New Haven, on the twenty-seventh day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and nineteen, by the Rt. Rev. William White, D. D., Bishop of Pennsylvania, the Rt. Rev. John Henry Hobart, D.D., Bishop of New York, and the Rt. Rev. Alexander Viets Griswold, D.D., Bishop of the Eastern Diocese.

With what degree of faithfulness, and with what success, I have fulfilled the duties of the sacred office, it becomes not me to speak. I entertain a most grateful sense of the indulgence and kindness with which my imperfect services have been received by the Diocese.

Commending the people of the Diocese, and yourself, as my assistant and successor, to the keeping of Almighty God,

I remain your affectionate friend and brother,

THOMAS CHURCH BROWNELL.

RT. REV. BISHOP WILLIAMS.



